

Picture of Grace

“Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike” (1 Samuel 30:24).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 30:21-25

Song: “Call It Grace”

When a person works and receives pay for his time, that’s a wage. When a person competes with an opponent and receives a trophy for winning, that is a prize. When a person receives appropriate recognition for his service or achievements, that is an award. But when a person is not capable of earning a wage, can win no prize, and deserves no award yet receives a gift anyway, then that is a picture of God’s unmerited favor. This is what we mean when we talk about the grace of God.

All of us have been in both places. We’ve done the work, won the game, completed the job, and in doing so, we got what we deserved. However, we’ve also been in the spot where we did nothing, won nothing, and accomplished nothing, but we still got the prize. I suppose we ought to call it what it is. Call it grace.

On a day long ago, in a place near the Besor Valley, David’s men learned about grace. You and I also know about grace. Though we don’t deserve it, God’s been good to us. Amazing, isn’t it? That’s grace.

Father, as I go throughout this day, be with me. Thank You for Your grace displayed in my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Do What You Can

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophecy in accordance with your faith (Romans 12:6).

Scripture: Romans 12:1-8

Song: “If We Are the Body”

Psychologists have studied the personality types of the people in orchestras and found significant differences. What’s interesting is that the differences tend to group according to the musical instruments chosen. For example, researchers found that people who play instrument “A” tend to be slow, methodical, and extroverted, while those who play instrument “B” are often quiet, meticulous, and introverted.

How can musicians so different come together to make such wonderful music? Despite personality differences, they subordinate those differences to the leadership of the conductor. With a conductor they play beautiful music.

Coming together for beautiful music is important for an orchestra—and a church. The “music” of the church isn’t necessarily the deep harmonies of Bach or the stirring symphonies of Beethoven. It’s doing the things that matter, under the direction of Jesus, our conductor. Preparing lunch for a homeless man, playing the piano at a senior center, and teaching a child a Bible verse are acts of kindness. And to Jesus they are the wonderful sonatas of His body doing what it was created to do. The body of Christ is uniquely gifted to serve. When each does his or her part, the result is beautiful and amazing.

Father, thank You for allowing me to serve You. Help me to see how I can use my gifts to help those around me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Be Humble

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves (Philippians 2:3).

Scripture: Philippians 2:1-11

Song: “Open the Eyes of My Heart”

In a 2008 softball game between Western Oregon and Central Washington, Mallory Holtman and Liz Wallace of Central Washington inspired people across the country. With two runners on base, Sara Tucholsky of Western Oregon blasted the first home run she'd ever hit. The joy was short-lived. As she ran the bases, she collapsed with a knee injury. She crawled back to first but couldn't move. The umpire said she would be out if her teammates helped her. A pinch runner could come in, but the homer would count only as a single. That's when Holtman and Wallace stunned their home crowd by carrying Tucholsky around the bases so the homer would count—even though it led to their own team's loss.

Putting your opponent ahead of yourself is unusual. It makes headlines! For we who follow Jesus, though, it is (or should be) our norm. Jesus showed us the way as He left the glory of Heaven to live here, submitting even to death on a cross. When we have a relationship with Jesus, others matter. As people cross your path today, allow the Holy Spirit to prompt you to act. Whether it's a word of encouragement, an act of kindness, or spending five minutes listening to someone, there will be opportunities for you to have the attitude of Jesus. May He open your eyes to see those opportunities.

Father, thank You for loving me. Help me to reflect Your attitude to everyone I meet today. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Power of the Gospel

The gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace (Colossians 1:6).

Scripture: Colossians 1:3-8

Song: “Word of God, Speak”

Through most of the medieval times, only Latin translations of the Bible were available. Most people were unable to read it and depended on the clergy for instruction. John Wycliffe was a priest and studied the Bible himself. He knew that most of the clergy were not teaching the gospel, so he dedicated his life to preaching the gospel and translating the Latin Bible into English.

Wycliffe endured persecution while translating. But he continued because he believed in the power of the gospel and the importance of helping people know the truth of Scripture—even by reading it themselves, if necessary.

The power of the gospel is available. Paul wrote of it to the Colossians. Wycliffe helped people in his time read it for themselves. And it’s there for you. A passionate pursuit of the gospel through Bible reading can impact your life in ways you can’t imagine. The heart of the gospel is in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as presented in God’s Word. Read it, let it grow and bear its fruit that will change your life, just as it has for others. Then go share the good news.

Father, thank You for Your Word and the power of the gospel. Rekindle faith, hope, and love in me to share Your message with others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Play as Only You Can

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Song: “Spirit of the Living God”

Most baseball fans know the superstars. Every fan wants a Derek Jeter or Stan Musial on their team. Most people, though, haven't heard of Jerry Terrell. But I suspect that just as great teams would love having Hank Aaron, Babe Ruth, and Mike Trout, every team could use a Terrell. He was a bit of a rarity during his playing days. He had a degree in accounting and looked the part; he wore glasses on and off the field. He wasn't a great hitter, but he was loved by fans and managers alike for his hustle on the field, his versatility (Terrell played eight of nine positions at least once in his major-league career), and his team spirit in the clubhouse.

Not every baseball player is equally gifted. There are some superstars, but there are some who, like Jerry Terrell, can fill in whenever and wherever needed. What's true on great baseball teams is true for the church. There are different gifts and abilities among God's people. Some have noticeable gifts, but others work behind the scenes, doing the little things.

Whatever your gifts and talents are, know that the Holy Spirit has equipped you to be a functioning member of God's team. Use your gift and see the difference God makes through you.

Father, thank You for equipping me to make a difference for You through the power of Your Spirit. Enable and embolden me today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Be Understood

In the church, I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue (1 Corinthians 14:19).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 14:13-19

Song: “Chain Breaker”

A woman was visiting a relative who was stationed in Germany. This visitor assumed that most Germans would speak English, but found that many people spoke only their native tongue—including the ticket inspector on the train. He punched her ticket, then chatted cordially for a bit, making gestures like a windmill. She nodded occasionally to show him that she was interested. He soon left, and an American soldier in the compartment leaned forward and asked if she spoke German. The woman confessed that she didn't—to which the young soldier said, “Then that explains why you didn't bat an eye when he told you that you were on the wrong train.”

Not knowing you're on the wrong train is bad, but not being able to understand you're on the wrong path to eternity is worse. Paul notes the importance and place of speaking in tongues but makes it clear that having people understand the message matters more. Hurting, broken people and those trapped in sin must hear the clear message of freedom through a relationship with Jesus. If you haven't grasped that before, grasp it today. If you know Jesus, speak clearly His message of hope to the lost world around you. It's not enough to just be heard. Be understood.

Father, thank You for the clear message of salvation and hope in Jesus. Let me share it plainly with everyone I meet. In Jesus' name, amen.

Love Matters

Now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13

Song: “Unfailing Love”

We know the song “Jesus Loves Me,” but maybe not its origin. The words were written for an 1860 novel, *Say and Seal*. It tells the story of a dying little boy who’s being rocked in the arms of his Sunday school teacher, John Linden. He asks John to sing him a song, “Jesus Loves Me.”

The profound depth of that song goes beyond childhood faith. Karl Barth, one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century, gave a lecture at the University of Chicago Divinity School. As he concluded, he was asked what he thought was the greatest theological discovery of his life. Everyone sat ready for a complex answer. Barth paused for a moment and said that he knew of no greater theological insight than the words of the song: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

In the middle of Paul’s written instruction on spiritual gifts is a chapter on the greatest gift—love. Understanding the truth that Jesus loves us helps us love others. Though faith is important, there will come a time when it won’t be needed. We’ll live in the presence of the Lord. Hope matters too, but a day will come when hope is realized. Love, however, will continue in eternity. Receive the love God has for you in Jesus, and love others.

Father, thank You for Your love expressed in Jesus. Help me to love as I’m loved, with all my heart. In Jesus’ name, amen.